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An Introduction to the Celtic Goddess Text

Welcome to the Celtic Goddess, but one manifestation of the Great Goddess, or White Goddess, who dominated mytho-poetics over a vast region of Europe and Asia for millenia starting before the Neolithic began. When the Indo-Europeans began to emerge from their homeland in southwestern Russia c.4,000 and migrate to both the west and east, their mytho-poetics of the male sky god collided with those of the White Goddess. In many instances, the Great Goddess was mortally wounded and driven underground in dozens of disconnected pieces. The Indo-Europeans were an aggressive nomadic people who had domesticated the horse and were adept at conducting mobile warfare with chariots. This technology allowed them to quickly dominate in many regions; we can side step the debate over the degree of pacifism inherent in Goddess culture.

However at the margin of their migrations, particularly in India and the Celtic realms of Europe, a much more complex interaction took place than simple warfare with clear-cut victory and defeat. The Indo-European invaders and the indigenous peoples fused into cultures that were hybrid on all levels from the mytho-poetic to the societal forms and rituals that are given structure by the myths. The White Goddess acquired new power and attributes, most notably in her manifestation as the Mare Goddess (horses were only food animals before the Indo-Europeans). The newly evolved Great Goddess possessed enormous strength which enabled her to resist the onslaught of Christianity for many centuries.

The White Goddess was never completely extinguished, although brutalized and maimed almost beyond recognition. By the late Middle Ages fragments of her ritual were preserved in the underground of peasant culture by women who came to be known as "witches". Sound scholarship has confirmed that they had little conscious knowledge of the ancient mytho-poetics but especially in the realm of healing, they preserved a portion of the timeless ritual. In the second half of this century, Western Culture is experiencing a New Age Movement, part of which is an attempt to rediscover the Goddess as an antedote to the spiritual sterility, chauvanism, aggression and ecological imperialism of the mainstream Christian Church. One of the timeless themes of history is the nostalgia for a "golden age" of the past, when life was simpler and better. In many hands, our contemporary revival of the Goddess begins with this dream then mixes in a little historical knowledge, personal anger and existentialism, and concludes by adding a heavy dose of feminist politics and stirs well. The result is a "reinvention" of

tradition in a fashion that has become typically American and typical of New Age Movements in general. Much of our fantasy literature and role-playing game design draws heavily upon an imagined Celtic realm that bears little relationship to what actually existed; their validity must lie in an assessment of their contribution to the imagination which is often considerable.

The problem thus created is enormous and my perception of this problem is a major motivation for an in-depth exploration of the archetypal Goddess, as opposed to the cartoon version available for sale in countless bookstores, retreat centers and weekend workshops. "Reinventing the wheel" has become a phrase to refer to either a project that is unnecessary because a well working "wheel" already exists, or an endeavor that might prove impossibly difficult within the context at hand. Unless, ignorance of history and the mythic archetypes that structure society is acceptable, reinvention of the Goddess is hardly necessary and indeed almost laughable in conception. She is, and always will be, there! Our job, if we wish to contact her, is to disover her; she is objectively real. Indeed the best of New Age Movements use the verb "disover" rather than "reinvent". Putting the Goddess into the clothes of contemporary pyscho-babble and New Age cultism insults her deeply and renders the profound trivial. The timeless truth that mytho-poetics cannot be divorced from context is no mere abstraction. The Goddess and Indo- European mythology, are the products of particular cultures evolving in very specific times and places. Everything nurtures everything else and all input is essential. In order to understand either system, which persisted in a strong and vital condition for millenia, it is necessary to explore the myths and cultures of those times in detail.

Only then can an informed judgement be made as to whether some or all of an ancient mytho-poetic might be applicable to our times, and if so, how such application might proceed. This approach recognizes and respects the cultural gulf between the creators of those mythic systems and ourselves. The gap between our society and tribal agriculturalists living in villages, towns and small cities (Goddess culture) or nomadic pastoralists forever on the move for land and adventure (Indo-Europeans) is enormous. To assume, without thinking, that the mytho-poetics of the Goddess can be applied to ourselves is simplistic, to say the least, for there is no similarity in cultural context. My objective in attempting to present an accurate historical record is not to set the stage for a conclusion of irrelevancy; I firmly believe that the Goddess is very relevant to our age. But that relevance will require modification and adaptation and should not be attempted in a vacuum of historical ignorance. If we understand where we were than we can better understand where we are and we thereby respect the Goddess. She won't help you if you do not understand her and cannot respect her.

How ancient mytho-poetics might be applied to our times, is a profound problem and I will not discuss it here. It will be the subject of a future meditation. Celtic.dos or .wpw is

one portion of a large 'multi-volume' project about the Goddess now underway at Reality Software. The "volumes" will only be published as software and will be marketed as shareware via BBS and direct mail. No paper books are planned or will be published. The various 'volumes' will be published out of sequential order as they are completed. This is customary with such projects; even the extraordinary unabridged Oxford Dictionary of the English Language was published volume by volume as completed and out of alphabetical order. Shareware users will acquire free of charge an outline and a few sample pages of each text. Registration will being you the full text (50 pages single spaced) with extensive references (see celtreg.doc). No colorful animation, almost no clip art, no interactive games are provided just a good heavy read for those who wish to explore these matters in detail. Each "volume" is attacked in rigorous, scholarly manner which employs the latest data base available; these are not supplements for high school social studies courses. You should also be aware that some of the historical record about ancient ritual documents practices that are extreme, to say the least, and might shock some readers. I have no wish to be offensive, but where the record is clear and potentially of significance it must be presented and discussed. Such is the timeless ethic of commitment to search for what is real. Hopefully, our vision and perspective are thereby broadened and we grow in intellectual knowledge and spiritual insight.

First, a word about what is contained in Celtic.dos or .wpw. This is not a document that summarizes the archeology and history of the Celts. Many good books are available on those subjects and registered users will receive a reading list for such an overview should they wish to explore on their own. One of the several volumes in preparation explores the archeology, reconstricted iconography, ritual, and mytho-poetic typology of the White Goddess throughout Europe and will include that of the Celts as well as many other peoples. Celtic.dos or .wpw is unusual in that the data base relies upon epic tales from medieval Ireland and Wales in which the Goddess plays a central role. Much interpretative nonsense has appeared in recent years that deals with these tales and separating the wheat from the chaff is not easy. To begin with, the researcher must exercise considerable self-discipline not to filter the analyis through the trendy nonsense of the worst of New Age goddess re-invention fantasies. Our job here is to see what is truly there, no more and no less, and leave the application to our times for another day. Hard harded archeologists scoff at using these narratives for a serious reconstruction of goddess mytho-poetics and ritual. The data certainly does not meet the requirements for "hard"; it is not an archeological object which has an objective physical existence; size, weight, surface contours etc. are not subject to varying interpretation because they are largely quantifiable. Nonetheless, there is a goldmine of valuable information in these epics, if one has done one's homework in the surrounding context of Celtic and Indo-European history and the religion and ritual of the Neolithic goddess of Old Europe (Gimbutas 1989). Filtered

through this interpretative structure, one can extract the metaphors, philosophy and ritual of the Celtic goddess without indulging in flights of irrelevant fantasy.

Furthermore, these are the only written epics about the Goddess that exist outside of India. Nowhere else did a goddess culture possess writing and have individuals motivated to write about the White Goddess in detail. (Another of the several "volumes" in preparation will explore the material from India and Tibet.) Granted the Celtic epics are not "pure" in the sense of pre-Christian but removing the Christian influence to uncover the goddess is not too difficult. An analysis of the Christian overlay allows us to chronicle the death of the Goddess. What is unveiled is extraordinary and a "window" into the distant pre-Christian past that has enormous interest and potentially great relevance for out times. This text relies heavily upon two studies which are unusual for their depth and clarity; O'Flaherty (1980) and Doan (1987). The latter is almost unique in the manner in which it explores the texts of the epics in great detail and brings to life the flesh and blood goddess with all of her personality and multiple manifestations. In these epics, the goddess is alive and vital and certainly not a mere intellectual reconstruction. Unfortunately, Doan (1987) is an "in house" manuscript that is virtually unavailable to the general public. It was "published" in one of the most restricted forms imagineable, that of a university departmental monograph. I have chosen to quote extensively from it in order to share the wealth of this valuable study with a much larger readership; it is unique in its clarity, rigor and discipline. For the record, James Doan and I have never met and we have no direct relationship of any kind. Registered users will receive a file (readers.hlp or readers.wpw) that explains the structure of the text presentation and explains how to extract my comments and interpretation from those of the references consulted; an issue of professional ethical importance to those wishing to utilize this text in writing of their own.

Readers will find references in the text to Timeline, another of Reality Software's publications. Timeline is a state of the art historical timeline covering the period 10,000 A.D. to 900 A.D. that emphasizes the history of culture, religion and myth. The presentation is scholarly and the data base utilized the very latest of published research. The perspective is global with great emphasis given not only to the classical Mediterranean world but NW Europe, India, Tibet, China and Japan as well. These 22 pages provide a perfect historical context within which to consider the various text documents about the goddess from Reality Software; it is, however, self contained as well. Many hours of pleasurable, thought provoking contemplation are contained within its pages. A registration form (timereg.reg) is provided as another file if Timeline sounds interesting and you would like to purchase it. The Timeline text documents may be viewed with any ASCII Dos text file viewer, but the timeline itself was prepared with Windows 3.0 and Excel 3.0 and you must have this software to view and/or print it.

I hope your interest is awakened and you will provide yourself with a very special reading experience that might, depending upon your life, lead into realms that go beyond the mere study of religious history.

References

Doan, J. 1987. "Women and Goddesses in Early Celtic History, Myth and Legend." Working Papers in Irish Studies No. 87-4/5. Boston: Northeastern Univ.

Gimbutas, M. 1989. The Language of the Goddess. New York: Harper & Row.

O'Flaherty, W.D. 1980. Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago.

If you wish to read more than a few sample pages of this presentation you must register. The complete celtic text (celtic.dos or celtic.wpw) comprises 50 single spaced pages and provides an extensive bibiliography; see celtic.doc. These references are invaluable if your interest motivates you to pursue any of this material further. You also have the option at registration to purchase a version of this package in which the files are formatted for Word Perfect for Windows (WPWIN). These files are identical in content to those formatted for old fashioned ASC II Dos Text but they utilize a desk top publishing format that includes bold, underline, italic and special characters such as gaelic letters with diacritical marks. The WPWWIN version also contains a file for a second version of the title page with two small maps of Ireland and the British Isles that are more or less readable (celttit2.wpw). If you have WPWIN and wish to own files with a splashier design, consider registration with this option.

3. Upon registration, you will not only be sent a second disc that contains an expanded celtic.doc file (celtic2.doc) readers.hlp and the complete celtic text, but you will also be placed on our permanent mailing list to receive future updates of the celtic package at special reduced rates and flyers about future publications from Reality Software as explained in celtic.doc.

January 20, 1992

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